

Cap'n Warren's Wards

By JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

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THE CAPTAIN REFUSES TO GIVE UP THE TRUST THAT HAS CAUSED HIM SO MUCH TROUBLE

Synopsis.—Atwood Graves, New York lawyer, goes to South Denboro, Cape Cod, to see Captain Elisha Warren. Caught in a terrific storm while on the way, he meets Cap'n Warren by accident and goes with the latter to his home. The lawyer informs Cap'n Warren that his brother, whom he had not seen for eighteen years, has died and named him as guardian of his two children, Caroline aged twenty, and Stephen, aged nineteen. The captain tells Graves he will go to New York and look over the situation before deciding whether he will accept the trust. The captain's arrival in New York causes consternation among his wards and their aristocratic friends. The captain makes friends with James Pearson, a reporter; then he consults with Sylvester, head of Graves' firm. The captain decided to accept his brother's trust. Sylvester is pleased, but Graves expresses disgust and dismay. Pearson calls and is surprised, for he had known the young Warrens and their father. Caroline asks the captain's aid for a servant whose father was hurt by an auto. The captain finds that Malcolm Dunn had caused the injury, and makes him help in paying the sufferer's expenses until his death. Pearson tells the captain of a difference he had with Rogers Warren because he refused to help the latter in a shady transaction. The captain plans a birthday celebration for Caroline, but the latter, who with Steve had been spending the day with the Duns, fails to return for dinner. The Duns give the young Warrens a colored view of Pearson's differences with their father. They upbraid both their uncle and Pearson.

CHAPTER XI—Continued.

"Oh, oh, Steve!" she cried, turning to her brother, sobbed hysterically on his shoulder. "Oh, Steve, what shall we do?"

Stephen put his arm about her waist. "It's all right, sis," he said soothingly. "Don't cry before him! I guess," with a glance at his uncle, "you've said enough to make even him understand—at last."

Captain Elisha looked gravely at the pair. "I guess you have," he said slowly. "I guess you have, Caroline. Anyhow, I can't think of anything you've left out. I could explain some things, but what's the use? And," with a sigh, "you may be right in a way. Perhaps I shouldn't have come here to live. If you'd only told me plain afore just how you felt I'd—maybe I'd—but there! I didn't know—I didn't know. You see, I thought—"

"However, I guess that part of your troubles is over. But," he added firmly, "wherever I am or wherever I go you must understand that I'm your guardian, just the same. I considered a long spell afore I took the place, and I never abandoned a ship yet once I took command of her. And I'll stick to this one! Yes, sir, I'll stick to it in spite of the devil—or the Duns, either. Till you and your brother are of age I'm goin' to look out for you and your interests and your money, and nothin' nor nobody shall stop me. As for forcin' my company on you, though, that—"



"What?" he shouted. "You mean he's quit?"

well, that's different. I callate you won't have to worry any more. Good night."

He thrust his hands into his pockets and walked slowly from the library.

CHAPTER XII. A Surprise For Pearson.

STEPHEN, the "man of the family," was the only member of the household, servants excepted, who slept soundly that night. Conscious of having done his duty in the affair with Pearson and his guardian and somewhat fatigued by the disagreeable task of soothing his hysterical sister, he was slumbering peacefully at 9 the next morning when awakened by a series of raps on his bedroom door.

"Ah! What? Well, what is it?" he demanded, testily opening his eyes. "Edwards, is that you? What the devil do you mean by making such a row?"

The voice which answered was not the butler's, but Caroline's.

"Steve! Oh, Steve!" she cried. "Do get up and come out! Come, quick! Something has happened."

"Happened? What is it?"

"I can't tell you here. Please dress and come to me as quick as you can."

Stephen found his sister standing by the library window, a letter in her hand. She looked troubled and anxious.

he demanded. "Perhaps it's his latch-key. Here! I'll do it myself."

He cut the cord and removed the cover of the little box. Inside was the jeweler's leather case. He took it out and pressed the spring. The cover flew up.

"Whew!" he whistled. "It's a present. And rather a decent one, too, by gad! Look Caro!"

He handed her the open case. She looked at the chain spread carefully on the white satin lining. Inside the cover was fitted a card. She turned it over and read: "To my niece, Caroline. With wishes for many happy returns and much love, from her Uncle Elisha Warren."

She sat gazing at the card. Stephen bent down, read the inscription and then looked up into her face.

"What?" he cried. "I believe—you're not crying! Well, I'll be hanged! Sis, you are a fool!"

The weather that morning was fine and clear. James Pearson, standing by the window of his rooms at the boarding house, looking out at the snow covered roofs sparkling in the sun, was miserable. When he retired the night before it was with a solemn oath to forget Caroline Warren altogether; to put her and her father and the young cad, her brother, utterly from his mind, never to be thought of again.

Why—why had he been so weak as to yield to Captain Elisha's advice? Why had he not acted like a sensible, self-respecting man, done what he knew was right and persisted in his refusal to visit the Warrens? Because he was an idiot, of course—a hopeless idiot, who had got exactly what he deserved! Which bit of philosophy did not help make his reflections less bitter.

After breakfast he went to his room, seated himself at his desk and took the manuscript of his novel from the drawer.

He was still sitting there, twirling an idle pencil between his fingers, when he heard steps outside his door. Some one knocked.

"Well, what is it?" he asked. His landlady answered.

"Mr. Pearson," she said, "may I see you?"

He threw down the pencil and, rising, walked to the door and opened it. Mrs. Hepton was waiting in the hall. She seemed excited.

"Mr. Pearson," she said, "will you step downstairs with me for a moment? I have a surprise for you."

"A surprise? What sort of a surprise?"

"Oh, a pleasant one—at least I think it is going to be a pleasant one for all of us. But I'm not going to tell you what it is. You must come down and see for yourself."

On the second floor Mrs. Hepton stopped and pointed.

"It's in there," she said, pointing.

"There" was the room formerly occupied by Mr. Saks, the long haired artist. Since his departure it had been vacant. Mrs. Hepton took Pearson by the arm and, leading him to the door, threw the latter open.

"Here he is," she said.

"Hello, Jim!" hailed Captain Elisha Warren cheerfully. "Ship ahoy! Glad to see you."

He was standing in the middle of the room, his hat on the table and his hands in his pockets.

Pearson was surprised—there was no doubt of that—not so much at the sight of his friend—he had expected to see or hear from the captain before the day was over—as at seeing him in that room. He could not understand what he was doing there.

Captain Elisha noted his bewildered expression and chuckled.

"Come aboard, Jim!" he commanded. "Come in and inspect. I'll see you later, Mrs. Hepton," he added, "and give you my final word. I want to hold office's council with Mr. Pearson here first."

Pearson began to get a clew to the situation.

"Captain Warren," he demanded, "have you—do you mean to say you've taken this room to live in?"

"No, I ain't said all that yet. I wanted to talk with you a little afore I said it. But that was my idea if you and I agreed on sartin matters."

"You've come here to live! You've left your—your niece's house?"

"Ya-as, I've left—that is, I left the way the Irishman left the stable where they kept the mule. He said there was all outdoors in front of him and only two feet behind. That's about the way 'twas with me."

"Have your nephew and niece?"

"Um-hm! They hinted that my room was better than my company, and, take it by and large, I guess they was right, for the present anyhow. I set up till 3 o'clock thinkin' it over, and then I decided to get out afore breakfast this mornin'. I didn't wait for any goodbys. They'd been said, or all I cared to hear"—Captain Elisha's smile disappeared for an instant—"last evenin'." The dose was sort of bitter, but it had the necessary effect. At any rate, I didn't hanker for another one. I remembered what your landlady told me when I was here afore, about this stateroom bein' vacated, and I come down to look at it. It suits me

well enough. Seems like a decent moorin's for an old salt water derelict like me. The price is reasonable, and I guess likely I'll take it. I guess I will."

"Why do you guess? By George, I hope you will!"

"Do you? I'm much obliged. I didn't know but after last night, after the scrape I got you into, you might feel—well, sort of as if you'd seen enough of me."

The young man smiled bitterly. "It wasn't your fault," he said. "It was mine entirely. I'm quite old enough to decide matters for myself, and I should have decided as my reason and not my inclinations told me. You weren't to blame."

"Yes, I was. If you're old enough I'm too old. I callate. But I did think—however, there's no use goin' over that. I don't want you to think that I've hove overboard that 'responsibility'



"It wasn't your fault," he said.

ty' I was so easy and fresh about takin' on my shoulders. It's there yet, and I'll see you squared with Caroline afore this v'yage is over if I live."

His friend frowned.

"You needn't mind," he said. "I prefer that you drop the whole miserable business."

"Well, maybe. But, Jim, you've taken hold of these electric batteries that doctors have sometimes? It's awful easy to grab the handles of one of those contraptions, but when you want to drop 'em you can't. They don't drop easy. I took hold of the handles of Bij's affairs, and though it might be pleasanter to drop 'em I can't—or I won't."

"Then you're leaving your nephew and niece doesn't mean that you've given up the guardianship?"

Captain Elisha's jaw set squarely.

"I don't remember sayin' that it did," he answered, with decision. Then, his good nature returning, he added: "Well, Jim, there's just one thing more. Have I disgraced you a good deal bein' around with you and chummin' in with you the way I have? That is, do you think I've disgraced you? Are you ashamed of me?"

"I? Ashamed of you? You're jokin'!"

"No, I'm serious. Understand now, I'm not apologizin'. My ways are my ways, and I think there're just as good as the next fellar's, whether he's from South Denboro or—well, Broad street. I've got a habit of thinkin' for myself and actin' for myself, and when I take off my hat it's to a bigger man than I am and not to a more stylish hat. But since I've lived here in New York I've learned that, with a whole lot of folks, hats themselves count more than what's underneath 'em. I haven't changed mine, and I ain't goin' to. Now, with that plain and understood do you want me to live here in the same house with you? I ain't fishin' for compliments. I want an honest answer."

He got it. Pearson looked him squarely in the eye.

"I do," he said. "I like you, and I don't care a blank about your hat. Is that plain?"

Captain Elisha's reply was delivered over the balusters in the hall.

"Hi!" he called. "Hi, Mrs. Hepton." The landlady had been anxiously waiting. She ran from the dining room to the foot of the stairs.

"Yes?" she cried. "What is it?"

"It's a bargain," said the captain. "I'm ready to engage passage."

The captain gets a hint that there are more rocks ahead. Read about this development in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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